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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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SPOT COMMENTARY: Delay in TWA Hostage Release

Despite contradictory reports that have circulated since early morning, it now appears that all of the TWA passengers and crew remain in Beirut.

- The last-minute problem that is holding up their release evidently was not anticipated by the Syrian Government, whose spokesman had announced earlier that the Syrians expected the hostages to arrive at any moment.

One possible explanation for the delay is that Nabih Barri has gotten "cold feet" despite Syrian assurances that the Shia detainees in Israel would be released soon after the TWA hostages were freed.

- Barri, whose political standing within the Shia community is on the line, may hope to extract a more definite guarantee that Israel is prepared to exchange the Atlit prisoners for the Americans.

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- Press reports also say he wants assurances that the US will not retaliate against him.

Another explanation is that Barri is having trouble persuading the Hizballah extremists to release the four TWA passengers they are holding.

- The reported absence of the four Hizballah captives from the dinner gathering yesterday evening lends some credibility to this theory.
- A Lebanese Christian factional radio station reported yesterday that Hizballah leaders, during a march staged in Baalabakk yesterday, urged the hijackers not to concede on their demands.

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